

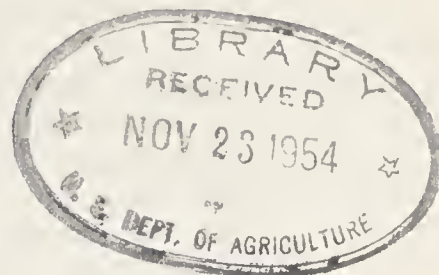
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## PUBLIC RELATIONS

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#### 1. GENERAL

- 1.1 REA telephone borrowers should establish and maintain good public relations. These suggestions and techniques have been tested and proven useful in the telephone industry for dealing with subscribers, with employees, and with stockholders or members.

#### 2. IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WILL IN THE COMMUNITY

- 2.1 The primary aim of a telephone company is to serve the public. In turn, the public (the subscribers) will normally be inclined to be proud of and support the company or cooperative which serves them well. Subscribers depend upon and regard the telephone as a necessary part of their daily lives, and are therefore quite prone to criticize any failure or inconvenience in service, any charges which they feel are unreasonable, and many aspects of system operations which they do not understand.
- 2.2 In the telephone industry, a system usually begins its existence with an incorporation charter granted by a public body, obtains an operating franchise from a public body, and makes charges according to a tariff approved by a public body. The public regulatory bodies are set up to protect both the legitimate interests of the utility and the public which depends on the company for service--at one and the same time.

- 2.3 Because of its relationship to public regulatory bodies, the public character of its service, and its dependence upon public good will for continuing in business, the telephone company or cooperative is well advised to enlist all possible public interest and support by providing full information about telephone operations and the endeavors of the local system as a community enterprise.
- 2.4 Lack of good will in the community where the system operates can seriously impair its stability. Ill will, whether the product of legitimate grievance or of imagination owing to lack of information, can delay subscriber payments, pile up complaints, increase the number of disconnects, undercut employee morale, cause heavy turnover of employees, and defeat efforts of the company or cooperative association to secure rights-of-way, adequate rates, and even franchise continuation.

### 3. PUBLIC RELATIONS TECHNIQUES

- 3.1 Good public relations is an art that requires the use of many techniques. Time and money will have to be expended to achieve benefits. A public relations program is not a "one-shot" activity but a long-term, continuing effort.
- 3.2 Employees have frequent contacts with subscribers and with the general public. To the public, the cashier, the information operator, or the man who installs the telephone are the only contacts with the business and by their attitudes the company is judged. Therefore, every employee must be aware of his public relations responsibilities.
- 3.3 Some companies include public relations as an integral part of regular employee training meetings. It is important that each employee know what constitutes courtesy in relations with the public over the telephone, by letter, and in personal contacts.
- 3.4 Employees who have been fully informed of the background, aims, policies, and operations of the telephone organization will have many opportunities to pass this information on to the public. On the other hand, employees who have not been provided regularly with data about the business may spread misinformation which can damage the organization.
- 3.5 Good employee relations is an important part of public relations. Those who work for the company or cooperative are part of the community and their attitudes easily become the opinions of their neighbors and friends. Establish an in-service training program and use the Operations Manual as a basis for training and assisting every employee to be a good company representative.



- 3.6 Subscribers will expect the telephone organization to play an active part in community activities. Friendly relations can be established by membership in civic clubs and attendance at meetings of these groups. Nearly every state has an association of independent telephone companies. The telephone system is expected to help in supporting local affairs of such groups as PTA, farm organizations. 4-H clubs, Boy Scouts, etc. Community celebrations and county fairs offer opportunities for favorable publicity as well as for neighborly cooperation.
- 3.7 Local newspapers offer one of the most valuable means of encouraging additional use of telephone services and of building good will for the operating system. The editor asks only that the material submitted to him be accurate and that it be news. Get acquainted with the editor. He is human. He likes to talk over anything he believes will help his community. He likes new angles to old themes. Keep him informed about the progress of each important project: what you are going to do, that you are doing it, and that it is done.
- 3.71 Here are some suggested topics that can be developed into news stories with good public relations angles:
- A. Approval of loan by REA, dial conversion, rebuilding of rural lines, service to new areas, new central offices and installation of central office equipment, open house to the public, cutover or other celebrations, storm damage, issue of new directory, rate changes, payment of taxes, election of officers, promotion of personnel, personnel retirements, safety records, traffic growth, human interest stories (emergency situations handled by the telephone, acts of heroism by employees, recollections of the first telephones).
- 3.72 Here are some tips about how to prepare stories for newspapers:
- A. Type your proposed story on 8½" x 11" paper. Use one side only and type double space. Put all the basic facts--who, what, when, where, and why or how--in the first paragraph. Names must be complete and correctly spelled; not just Mrs. Smith, but Mrs. James R. Smith, Fork Creek Road. Get your story to the editor while it is still news. Submit pictures (clear glossy prints) whenever appropriate.

- 3.8 An advertising budget of modest size should be set up for institutional or "good will advertising" in the newspapers, as well as for promotional advertising (extensions, directory solicitation, change of rates, long-distance calls, etc.). The editor cannot be expected to carry such material free as "stories".
- 3.9 Posters, matt service, inserts, and other promotional material is available to telephone organizations through various advertising services and associations of independent telephone companies.
- 3.10 Radio is an important medium for reaching subscribers and extending community service. Since the telephone subscribers make up a large portion of the station's audience, the program director (or farm director, if the station has one) is likely to be interested in discussing how the telephone system and the radio station can help each other. Get acquainted with the station personnel. Let them know that you are willing to supply factual information whenever they can use it. The local radio station may offer another valuable means of advertising.
- 3.11 The business office need not and should not be lavish, but it must be kept clean and tidy. Advantage should be taken of window space and floor space inside the business office to show displays of equipment, a map of the system, photos of new construction and installations, exhibits to promote advertising in the forthcoming directory, to encourage telephone courtesy, to explain how to dial correctly, etc.

#### 4. IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SUBSCRIBER RELATIONS

- 4.1 Subscribers are the most important part of the public which your public relations program seeks to reach and influence. Some telephone companies have posted in their offices the following injunctions:
  - A A subscriber is the most important person with whom we do business.
  - B A subscriber is not dependent on us; we are dependent on him.
  - C A subscriber is not an interruption of our work; he is the purpose behind it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him; he is doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so.
  - D A subscriber is not an outsider to our business; he is a vital part of it.



- E. A subscriber is not a cold statistic; he is a flesh and blood human being with feelings and emotions like our own and with biases and prejudices.
- F. A subscriber is not someone with whom to argue or match wits.
- G. A subscriber is a person who brings us his wants. It is our job to handle them satisfactorily, both to him and to ourselves.

4.2 The majority of subscriber complaints originate in misunderstanding or lack of information.

## 5. SUBSCRIBER RELATIONS TECHNIQUES

- 5.1 Subscribers judge their telephone company by the impression received from employees. That is why the employee is listed at first in planning a public relations program. The responsibility of an employee is to be friendly, efficient, honest, and straightforward in dealing with subscribers.
- 5.2 The impression made over the telephone is as important as that made face to face. There are a few simple rules of good telephone manners. Answer the telephone promptly. Don't whisper or mumble into the telephone, and don't shout. Be courteous at all times. Return all "left" calls as soon as possible. Never forget to make a promised call. Be sure someone is available to answer your office telephones at all times.
- 5.3 Every letter is an opportunity to build good will for the organization.
  - 5.31 Write each letter as if it were to a personal friend. This implies sincerity and getting to the point quickly. It means an informal rather than a stuffed-shirt approach. Don't make excuses.
  - 5.32 Letters should be answered promptly.
  - 5.33 The physical appearance of a letter is important in making a good impression. Keep paragraphs short and margins wide.
- 5.4 Every monthly billing is a golden opportunity for a message to subscribers--a chance to pass on to them information about the telephone organization which serves them. Many telephone companies regularly use eye-catching

inserts which call attention to a new service being offered, operating statistics, sale of stock, changes in system personnel, or suggestions on how to get the most out of a party line. Cartoons, display type, or colored paper add to the attractiveness of these inserts. In smaller companies and in cooperative associations, an informal, personalized message from the president or manager presented in this way can be very effective.

5.5 Some telephone organizations publish regular newsletters for subscribers. These range all the way from mimeographed sheets and simple photo-offset pages to elaborate letterpress publications on fine paper. The most effective are those which keep the published items short and newsy. People like to see in print their own names and those of neighbors. They are most interested in what happens close to home. Statistics and new regulations need to be interpreted with graphs, cartoons or photos, or related in terms of illustrative incidents or examples.

5.6 The new edition of the telephone directory can build subscriber good will by its accuracy and by the explanatory information which it contains.

## 6. SPECIAL OBLIGATIONS OF MUTUAL OR COOPERATIVE-TYPE SYSTEMS

6.1 In addition to the many techniques already listed, members of cooperative or mutual organizations depend upon annual reports prepared by the board of directors and the manager, and upon the annual membership or stockholders meeting at which these reports are presented. Although the meetings are a "family affair", there is, nevertheless, a distinct public relations aspect to every meeting. Because so many residents of the rural area are members or stockholders, the meeting is a community event and a news topic.

6.2 Open house tours of the central offices are impressive events for members--and for groups of school children or 4-H Clubs and similar organizations.